

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

### INTRODUCTION

It might be unusual to find a Christmas message within the trial and crucifixion of Christ. But in all the darkness and confusion of these horrific events, a phrase bursts out of the Gospel of John like fireworks on a dark night: **“for this purpose I was born”**.

The Bible teaches us many reasons<sup>1</sup> why Jesus came into this world. He came to <sup>1</sup>show us the Father, to <sup>2</sup>save His people from their sins, <sup>3</sup>to destroy the work of the Devil, <sup>4</sup>to fulfill the Law and so on. But when Jesus stands before Pilate, prior to His crucifixion He makes a clear statement of His purpose. Let's read the text first.

### **TEXT: John 18: 33-40**

Turn with me, please to the Gospel of John, chapter 18. We'll read verses 33 to 40.

### THE NARRATIVE

Pilate was appointed by the Emperor Tiberius to govern the Roman province of Judea. Pilate is representing the Roman state in the trial of Jesus. The Jews need a guilty verdict and a death sentence. They accused Christ of blasphemy, but they did not have the power to execute and additionally, blasphemy was not a capital crime against Rome. The Jewish leaders trumped up charges of sedition and Jesus was brought before Pilate with the purpose, to find Jesus guilty where He could be executed. John records this discussion between Pilate and Jesus. We pick it up in verse 37:

*“Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.” (John 18:37–38, ESV)*

Now Jesus clearly states why He came into this world: “to bear witness to the truth.” That's clear, isn't it. So, let's make this plain. You are asked why did God send His Son into the world, born as a human? The answer? He came to testify to the truth. Imagine this assumption: we have a world of humanity all confused so they cry out to God as Pilate did, “What is truth?” God responds by sending the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God to earth, taking on human flesh and says, “Go tell them what truth is.”

But there's more here, let's look closely at the dialogue between Christ and Pilate. Pilate has sedition, treason, subversion on his mind. He states, “So you're a king!” Jesus answers, “You say that I am a

king.” The response of Jesus is a unique rhetorical response<sup>1</sup>. If I was writing a paraphrase, I’d interpret Jesus reply as, “Sort of!” Jesus is not denying it. The NIV’s translation “You are right in saying I am a king” is right, but the tone is probably communicating, “I am a king ... but there’s more to it.”

## **WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KINGDOM & TRUTH?**

**So, here is the expositor’s question: What is the connection between kingdom and truth?** This is not me being difficult. To understand the text, we need to ask that question; otherwise it doesn’t make sense. Is Pilate talking about one thing: kingdoms; and is Jesus talking about another thing: truth? Or is Jesus trying to change the topic in mid stream? I don’t think so. I think Jesus is making a real connection between things kingly and things about truth.

- ★ I think that Jesus is saying that He is the King of truth.
- ★ I think that Jesus is saying that the character of His Kingdom is Truth.
- ★ I think that Jesus is saying that Caesar Augustus was king of Rome, but He was King of Truth.
- ★ I think that Jesus was saying that the reason He was born was to establish a Kingdom of Truth among mankind.
- ★ I think that Jesus was saying that if you are part of that Kingdom of Truth you get your clues, your information, your sense of reality from Him, not Rome.

The obvious implication for Pilate is that if Pilate really wanted to know the truth, He would enter Christ’s kingdom as Christ’s citizen and give Jesus his serious attention. Pilate replies, “What is truth?” Now we have no idea of the tone of that question. Was it an honest question? What is truth? Or was it a cynical question? Or was it a smirky sarcastic question. We don’t know. Was it facetious, scornful, impatient, despairing, or sincere? My opinion (scary) is that it was scornful. It could be more like, “Who cares!” It’s a demeaning of truth.

In the kingdom of Rome what mattered was earthly power, conquered nations, wealth, prosperity, prominence, etc. etc. So, what is truth? “Who cares!” “Tell me something important!”

## **JESUS CAME TO ESTABLISH A KINGDOM OF TRUTH**

The point of this dialogue and what should get our attention this morning is this: Jesus came to establish a kingdom, a kingdom of truth. The citizens of that kingdom are characterized by people who listen and respond to the King of Truth. And thirdly, it matters. It is more important than anything else in the world. So, the Bible says,

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce, pp. 353–354.” (HTFG C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge University Press, 1963). Bruce F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Pickering and Inglis, 1983) - Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 594). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

- John 1:14, 17 (ESV), <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- John 14:6 (ESV), <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- John 15:26 (ESV), <sup>26</sup> “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.
- John 17:17, 19 (ESV), <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth . . . <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. [Jesus died so we could be set apart for truth!]
- Ephesians 1:13 (ESV) , <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit
- 1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV), <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- 1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV), <sup>15</sup> if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

And the Bible also says,

- Romans 1:18, 25 (ESV), <sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth . . . <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12 (ESV), <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

## **CONCLUSION**

So, in answer to Pilates demeaning question, “What’s the big deal about truth?” The answer is the big deal is life and death; Heaven and Hell; eternal glory and unimaginable joy or endless suffering under the wrath of God. Truth matters. Jesus came to establish a kingdom of truth. Those who have bowed to the King and entered the kingdom through the New Birth<sup>2</sup> are characterized by their obedience to the

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:3, 5 (ESV), <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” . . . <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

truth. They are people who have built their house on the Rock<sup>3</sup>. They are people who enter the Kingdom and do the will of God the Father.<sup>4</sup>

Of all the things we think about at Christmastime, it is critical to remember that Jesus left heaven's glory to become a man and one of the reasons He did that was to establish a Kingdom – a kingdom of truth. His citizens are characterized as those who listen to the truth. They hear and obey.

## **APPLICATION**

We live in a world where the dominant philosophy is conceptualism. Truth is based upon how we conceive it. We hear phrases like “your truth” and “my truth”. “You do your thing; and I’ll do mine.” This ideology in our world has become so bizarre that a boy can conceive of himself as a girl; and vice versa. You can wake up in the morning and decide which gender you are!

Truth as you conceive it means that you get to define love the way you want. The gay partner is offended because you to them who they can love. We get to define marriage the way we want. We get to define justice the way we want. We get to define life, when it begins and when it ends – the way we want.

Truth is not relative in the Kingdom of Truth. The Truth is what Jesus says it is. Someone once said to the late Dr. R.C. Sproul: “The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it.” Sproul replied, “It is settled whether you believe it or not.” “The Bible says it. That settles it.”

Jesus came to establish a Kingdom of Truth. Those who are in the Kingdom listen to Him. Does that describe you and I?

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:24 (ESV), <sup>24</sup> “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:21 (ESV), <sup>21</sup> “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

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- 1) <sup>i</sup> He came to reveal God to humans. *"No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."* (John 1:18, ESV)
  - 2) He came to save His people. *"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21, ESV)
  - 3) He came to fulfill the requirements of the law. *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."* (Matthew 5:17–18, ESV)
  - 4) He came to destroy the works of the Devil. *"Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."* (1 John 3:8, ESV)
  - 5) He came to fulfill the promises to Israel. *"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.'"* (Romans 15:8–9, ESV)